*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | November 13, 2020 |
| **Subject:** | School Reopening Update, Enrollment Trends, and Proposed Next Steps |

**Guidance and Support to Schools and Districts**

Since our meeting on October 20, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has continued to inform districts of new developments related to COVID-19 and to support schools and districts as they serve students during the pandemic. Here are a few key actions in the past month.

On October 23, we sent a memo to district leaders, leaders of educational collaboratives, and leaders of approved special education schools about Abbott BinaxNOW rapid COVID-19 tests.

The test gives results in 15 minutes, and the federal Food and Drug Administration has approved the test for symptomatic individuals. The federal Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense announced an initiative to deliver 150 million of the tests to schools and other settings. Over the course of the school year, Massachusetts will obtain approximately 2 million tests for use in priority settings including but not limited to public school districts, charter schools, educational collaboratives, and approved special education schools. We held a webinar for interested districts on October 28 and will introduce the first phase of these tests with a group of districts and schools.

On November 3, following Governor Baker’s [revised executive order on masks](https://www.mass.gov/doc/covid-19-order-55/download), we clarified that schools should continue to follow DESE’s **requirements on masks,** as set forth in the [Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dese-fall-reopening-guidance/download) issued on June 25. The Executive Order provides a few exceptions based on sector-specific COVID-19 safety rules, including rules issued by DESE.

On November 6, when the Baker-Polito Administration and COVID-19 Command Center released [updated metrics for schools and municipalities](https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-covid-19-command-center-department-of-elementary-secondary), we released [updated school guidance](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/interpreting-dph-metrics.html) that continues to prioritize in-person instruction. The guidance includes the following:

* Districts are expected to prioritize in-person learning across all color-coded categories, unless there is suspected in-school transmission, in accordance with DESE's [Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/protocols/) *(download)*.
* Districts and schools in communities designated gray, green, or yellow are expected to have students learning fully in-person, if feasible.
* Schools in red communities should implement hybrid models, while maximizing in-person learning time for high-needs students.
* In those communities with the highest COVID-19 caseloads and test positivity rates (e.g. currently, Chelsea, Lawrence, and Revere), DESE and DPH will work with local school officials to develop and implement customized strategies to reduce in-school health risks.
* Fully remote instructional models should be implemented only as a last resort.

**Enrollment Trends and Possible Next Steps**

The Department is currently reviewing the information that school districts have submitted on their learning models and school enrollments. At our November 24 meeting, I will update the Board on our analysis of this information and possible next steps.

Attachments: From our [Guidance/On the Desktop Messages](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop.html) web page:

* Updates to Guidance on Interpreting DPH COVID-19 Health Metrics — November 6, 2020
* Response to questions about Governor Baker's November 2 revised executive order on masks — November 3, 2020
* Abbott Labs/BinaxNOW Webinar Recording
* Abbott Labs/BinaxNOW Webinar Presentation
* Phase I — BinaxNOW Rapid Point of Care COVID-19 Testing for K-12 Schools